



Just how pathogenic to pets and humans are the bacteria in the concentrations found in raw pet foods

Dear Sir,

As veterinarians advising owners who feed raw meat diets to their pets, we would welcome articles on raw pet food, if, in addition to culturing and gleefully reporting the bacterial species found in raw pet foods, the authors would include in the discussion and abstract the pathogenic relevance for dogs, cats, and humans of each bacterial species at the bacterial concentration found.

Most of the meat for humans and pets is produced intensively, accumulated in abattoirs for slaughter, and then concentrated in packing plants for processing and packing; bacterial contamination is integral to the system. The public health aim is to minimize the bacterial count, mostly eliminate virulent pathogenic species, and educate the consumer to reduce human ingestion of pathogenic bacteria and toxins. Considering that very few people handle raw meat safely (1–4), it behooves us, as professional advisors on pet nutrition, to supply the correct information to our clients about feeding a balanced raw food diet and handling raw meat for their pets safely. This is the information in these “raw diet” articles that would be most useful to practitioners.

The various authors of articles on raw pet food are most concerned with the fecal shedding of *Salmonella* spp. In the study by Joffe and Schlesinger (5), *Salmonella* spp. were cultured from 80% of the diets, but from only 30% of fecal samples from dogs fed those diets. However, the frequency of fecal isolation of *Salmonella* spp. from healthy dogs in general (not fed raw food diets) can be as high as 36% (6–8). *Salmonella* spp. can contaminate and replicate in processed food during storage (6). There is published evidence that many dogs are able to eliminate *Salmonella* spp. after being fed either contaminated food or a single large dose of the *Salmonella* sp. that was pathogenic to humans (9,10).

As Weese et al (11) carefully point out, in another study of raw meat products intended for human consumption (12) it is stated, “*Salmonella* spp. were identified from 7.5% of ground beef, 44.6% of ground chicken, and 49.9% of ground turkey samples.” As pet owners usually handle their pets’ raw meat in pet-specific containers separately from their own food, both in time and space, there is reduced chance of cross contamination. As Weese et al state: “adequate information regarding the health risks associated with feeding raw diets is currently lacking...” Perhaps this is because the feeding of raw diets to pets (usually by informed owners) poses a low or negligible risk to family members (6).

On the other hand, the cross contamination potential from raw meat for human consumption is very real,

especially as raw meat and other foods for a meal, including salads, are usually prepared concurrently. Maybe the authors would like to be consistent in their cautious advice and recommend either only the sale of cooked meat for both humans and pets, or pan-Canadian vegetarianism.

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